**Chapter 191: Grand Fountain (4)**

Who is it?

The thought that came to mind the moment I saw the woman sprawled out sleeping on the sofa.

Because it was someone I'd never seen before.

Where did the being that should have been here go, and why was this unfamiliar woman lying in this space?

Even eating potato chips and reading manga while at it!

'Wait, is it even human to begin with?'

From the outside, it definitely looks human.

The unkempt hair, the closed eyelids, and the breasts that rise and fall with each breath.

-Scratch scratch.

The woman on the sofa moved around and stuck her hand inside her sweatshirt to scratch her belly.

It seemed like there couldn't be anyone living a more lazy and sluggish life than this.

Of course, if you searched the world there might be someone somewhere, but this wasn't the place where such a person should be.

"Excuse me?"

"Uhh...?"

At the brief question, the woman's eyes flew open.

-Blink blink.

The woman's eyes captured the image of a man wearing a helmet.

Her mouth opened immediately, her pupils dilating instantly.

'...Huh?'

The moment the woman showed a startled reaction, for some reason my heart stirred strangely.

'This reaction, surely from somewhere...'

A ticklish, dreamy feeling in my chest.

But that feeling lasted only very briefly.

"...Oh...? Hyaaaaaah!"

The woman's body reacted violently and the sofa was about to fall backward in an instant.

My body moved before my head could understand the situation, and I grabbed the falling sofa.

Pong-

However, something unfortunate happened in the process.

Something covered my field of vision.

Large and soft, squishy breasts mercilessly pressing against my face.

Since armor was disabled here, there was no helmet blocking my face, allowing me to feel that sensation in full.

"Uuuub."

Hydraulic pressure so strong it was hard to breathe.

Having somehow ended up with my face buried in the woman's breasts, I barely managed to resist the temptation of that amazing sensation and lifted my head.

"Huu, uuuu...!"

The moment I saw the blushing woman reaching her hand toward me.

Shaaaaaa-

My vision was dyed with brilliant light.

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"...you awake?"

An unfamiliar voice wrapped around my ears.

"Are you coming to your senses?"

-Poke. Poke poke.

Something was pressing into my cheek.

It seems to have a strangely matured female scent.

Unlike that impression, the sound reaching my ears was a voice I'd heard before.

It was identical to the woman's voice I'd just heard.

My eyes flew open.

"Huh...!"

"Oh, you're awake?"

When I turned my gaze toward where the voice came from, there was someone who looked exactly like the woman who had been lying on the sofa earlier, now lying on a bed.

However, I could instinctively tell that these two beings were completely separate individuals.

Though the voice itself was identical, the tone and atmosphere were completely different.

I looked around dazedly.

Unlike the pure white space I'd entered each time I fell into the fountain, this was a gloomy space filled with nothing but darkness.

Thanks to the candlelight illuminating the surroundings, I could maintain minimal visibility, but this place was too dark and eerie.

Unlike the pure white space that instinctively made my heart swell and warm feelings spring forth, this was a place full of anxious and negative energy.

'It's like...the labyrinth.'

And the woman situated in the middle of such an ominous place moved her foot with a voice full of interest.

"Heeh...Ooh..."

-Poke. Poke poke.

I looked at whatever had been pressing into my cheek since earlier.

A foot.

It was the woman's foot.

I was lying at the foot of the bed, being treated like a footrest for the strange woman.

Her pretty, delicate toes were visible through black stockings pressed against various parts of my face.

Above that, a blue sweatshirt and dolphin pants barely containing her about-to-burst buttocks.

The stitching of the dolphin pants following the crotch seam was desperately crying out for help as it struggled to contain the plump mound of her pussy.

-Press. Press press.

"So squishy..."

The woman who was still poking my cheek with her big toe muttered.

"Excuse me..."

"Hm? Ah, sorry. It's been a while since I've touched a living being's face."

When I looked at her with a dumbfounded expression, she answered like that and met my eyes.

"So, who are you? How did you get here? This is a place that can only be accessed by those who have received grace, that white female cat with the authority of consciousness ceremony, or those similar to me? Since the latter two possibilities are out, are you one who received grace?"

"...Pardon?"

I didn't understand a word she was saying.

"Um... First, who are you...?"

When I asked back with a puzzled face, the woman's expression also became tinged with surprise.

"You, you don't know me? This me?"

"Yes. I'm meeting you for the first time..."

"Hmm...? Ah. I guess it's natural you don't know. Times must have changed. It's been quite a while since I was sealed. Hmm...how troublesome...Huaaaam."

The woman who seemed to understand and nod to herself, once again with a composed expression, nodded her head.

And after letting out a languid yawn, she revealed her identity.

"I can't tell you my true name, but I can tell you what I used to be called."

"Ah, yes..."

Even if she said that, the probability of me knowing who she is was low.

Just from her way of speaking, she seemed like an impressive person, but I didn't know much about this world's history.

"I am the Demon of Sloth."

"What?"

But the being she named was one I'd been hearing about often lately.

"The other demons called me a traitor. Pfft."

She chuckled while looking at my reaction, and tilted her head as she asked.

"I've revealed my identity, now it's your turn."

I encountered an unexpected being in an unexpected place.

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-Crunch!

The crispy potato chip snapped cleanly at her lips.

"Ow, salty. Well, that's what makes it good though. Ah, want some too, Balkan?"

We had briefly exchanged introductions.

She kept calling me 'one who received grace', so I had no choice but to reveal my name.

"Ah, yes..."

"What's with the formality? Speak casually. Casual."

I looked at the woman who handed me potato chips while sprawled on the bed.

Self-proclaimed Demon of Sloth.

She really was...

"Huaaaaaaaaah."

Extremely slothful.

The sight of her scratching her lower belly while yawning languidly.

With her other hand, she scooped up a handful of potato chips to put in her mouth, and slowly turned the pages of her manga one by one.

All these actions took place on the bed.

It was the first time I'd seen the words beauty and complete bum come together.

No, perhaps it wasn't the first time.

Because the one I saw in that pure white space had the exact same appearance as the Demon of Sloth.

"Um, are you...?"

"......"

"...do you have two bodies?"

"Huuh? What are you talking about?"

She looked at me as if I was speaking nonsense.

She suddenly threw aside the potato chips and manga she'd been eating while lying down and raised her body that had been lying there.

The Demon of Sloth.

Probably a being similar to Bunny, the Demon of Gluttony trapped in the axe.

Her impression was very different from what I'd thought.

While Bunny had been extremely aggressive from the moment she first saw me, I couldn't feel any such hostility from the Demon of Sloth before me.

Just powerlessness and boredom.

Such emotions pervaded the Demon of Sloth's eyes, and occasionally when she looked at me, a tiny bit of interest would settle in those eyes.

"Actually..."

Although I wondered if it was okay to say this, I briefly told her what had happened earlier in the pure white space to resolve my doubts.

The moment the woman's hand there shone with light, I fell into this place of darkness.

The woman sleeping lying on the sofa and the Demon of Sloth who had the exact same appearance as that woman.

The Demon of Sloth who had been listening to my words for a moment chuckled.

"Aha. So that Earth Mother Goddess's fragment ended up using my avatar? Right. She probably wanted to rest too. It's human nature after all."

"W-wait. What did you say? Earth Mother Goddess? Why does that suddenly come up?"

Earth Mother Goddess.

Isn't that the goddess that the Earth Mother Goddess Order blindly follows?

'Why would such a being come from the labyrinth, no, from the fountain?'

Suddenly I recalled how the followers of the Earth Mother Order regarded the grand fountain specially.

When the injured Jubeel leaked breast milk at the grand fountain, the sight of several priests foaming at the mouth and going berserk saying she was defiling the sacred grand fountain.

Even Hitolis, the priest in our party, said the grand fountain was a special sanctuary that one must visit at least once to become a high priest.

"Well... the fountain is a place prepared by the Earth Mother Goddess to more efficiently imprison demons and bind her fragments to the mortal world? Didn't you know?"

I didn't know.

No, how many explorers would even know such knowledge to begin with?

Unless you were involved with the temple, and even then in a fairly high position, it would be information you couldn't know.

"Fragments of a great being cannot roam the mortal world for long by law. For that, a 'catalyst' that can bind them is needed. The fountain serves as that catalyst."

"Uh...then, that avatar of yours..."

"Normal fountains only hold the Earth Mother Goddess's fragments, they don't give them freedom. But the fountain on the 15th floor where the peace treaty was made is different. If you add possession of an avatar on top of the catalyst, the range of movement becomes much wider. You don't understand?"

Seeing my blank face, she asked again, and I could only nod.

"You need to study mythology before exploring the labyrinth. There's nothing in your head."

"......"

It was a humiliating expression but I had no words to refute because I was far too ignorant about this world.

Though I occasionally read books and gathered information, the history of this world was outside my interests.

"To summarize, you're saying the Earth Mother Goddess's fragment is temporarily borrowing your avatar?"

"That's right! You're not completely braindead after all."

"By any chance, habits... like putting hands on the belly while sleeping, do they become similar to yours?"

"Yeah. Since it's my avatar. Behaviors ingrained in the body would be like that?"

But I understood the necessary parts.

It felt like some questions were being answered.

The reason why Bunny, the Demon of Gluttony, had rushed toward the fountain from the moment she awakened from that ominous black egg.

Meeting that person wrapped in light every time I entered the fountain.

'Moreover, according to the Demon of Sloth, [the one wrapped in light] is...a fragment of the Earth Mother Goddess.'

Such fragments of the Earth Mother Goddess reside in fountains on every floor that's a multiple of 5.

An odd sense of discomfort enveloped my entire body.

When I asked that person, the Earth Mother Goddess's fragment I met at the 10th floor fountain.

That being told me to head toward the depths of the labyrinth.

Saying that if I did so, I could obtain what I desire most.

-Big brother!

The image of my little sister sitting on her hospital bed, always smiling brightly, flashed through my mind.

My little sister who always supported me with a smile that gave me strength just by looking at it.

'My little sister is related to such a being?'

Why is it?

Today especially, she felt so far away.

-Slap!

I slapped my cheek to gather my wavering thoughts.

I didn't think unnecessary thoughts.

What I needed to do in this labyrinth was still just one thing.

-Poke poke.

"Hey. Balkan."

Following the toes poking my thigh, I saw the Demon of Sloth watching me with her chin propped up in both hands.

"Would you like to make one request...no, one contract with me?"

"Contract?"

"Yeah. Since you were able to come here, I think you can probably do it."

The demon's whisper speaking in a sweet voice lingered in my ears.

Come to think of it, why was the Demon of Sloth here? Is there more history that I don't know?

The moment I harbored such doubts, her lips opened.

"Those guys running wild in the mortal world saying they'll resurrect me. Could you take care of them all?"

Before I could answer, the Demon of Sloth continued.

"If you make a contract with me, I'll give you something that feels so good...you won't want to lift a finger for the rest of your life."